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AB-781 Accessibility to emergency information and services: emergency shelters: persons with pets.
(2023-2024)

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Assembly Bill No. 781

CHAPTER 344

An act to add Section 8593.10 to the Government Code, relating to emergency services.

[Approved by Governor October 07, 2023. Filed with Secretary of State October 07, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 781, Maienschein. Accessibility to emergency information and services: emergency shelters: persons with pets.

Existing law, the California Emergency Services Act, provides that political subdivisions, as defined, have full power during a local emergency to provide mutual aid to any affected area in accordance with local ordinances, resolutions, emergency plans, or agreements. Existing law defines "emergency plan" for these purposes to mean official and approved documents that describe the principles and methods to be applied in carrying out emergency operations or rendering mutual aid during emergencies. Existing law requires that a county send a copy of its emergency plan to the Office of Emergency Services upon an update to the plan.

Upon the next update to a city or county's emergency plan, this bill would require a county to update its emergency plan to designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets, and would require a city that has previously adopted an emergency plan designating emergency shelters to update its emergency plan to designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets. This bill would require, upon the next update to a city or county's emergency plan, whenever a city or county designates any number of emergency shelters that it also designate at least one emergency shelter that can accommodate persons with pets. This bill would also require, upon the next update to a city or county's emergency plan, whenever a city or county designates any number of cooling centers or warming centers, that it also, to the extent practicable, designate at least one cooling center or warming center, as applicable, that can accommodate persons with pets. The bill would require an emergency shelter designated as able to accommodate persons with pets to be in compliance with safety procedures regarding the sheltering of pets referenced or established in the component of the state and local emergency plan and applicable disaster assistance policies and procedures of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

This bill would also require a city or county to include whether the cooling or warming center can accommodate pets whenever a city or county provides public information regarding the availability of a cooling center or warming center. This bill would require a city or county to make available to the public by posting on its internet website information for pet emergency preparedness, including, but not limited to, among other things, information for creating an evacuation plan and emergency checklist for pets consistent with recommendations publicly published by the Department of Food and Agriculture and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

This bill would also make various findings and declarations in this regard. By requiring cities and counties to update their emergency plans, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

- (a) Natural disasters and extreme weather events, including wildfire, flooding, earthquakes, extreme heat, and extreme cold, present severe risks to public health and safety in California.
- (b) Pets are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions, including increased risk of heatstroke-related illness and death.
- (c) A majority of Americans consider their pets to be family members. Research has found the most significant risk factor for evacuation failure is pet ownership. Research indicates that pet owners may refuse evacuation, attempt to illegally reenter evacuation sites to rescue their animals, and face grief, depression, and PTSD because of separation from their pet during an emergency (Heath and Linnabary, Challenges of Managing Animals in Disasters in the U.S., Mar. 26, 2015, 5 Animals 173).
- (d) Zoonotic disease risks increase when pets are abandoned or left to roam.
- (e) Gaps in public preparedness and cosheltering opportunities during a disaster or extreme weather event increase risks to public health and safety.
- (f) It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this legislation to provide guidance in increasing public preparedness and establishing cosheltering standards so that Californians know that when a disaster or extreme weather event occurs, they will not have to choose between seeking safety and staying with their pets.

SEC. 2. Section 8593.10 is added to the Government Code, to read:

8593.10. (a) For the purposes of this section, all of the following definitions apply:

- (1) "Cooling center" means a facility established to mitigate the public health impacts of extreme heat.
- (2) "Emergency shelter" means a temporary or provisional safe space that provides a basic shelter for people affected by disaster.
- (3) "Pet" means a domesticated animal, such as a dog or cat, that is commonly kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes.
- (4) "Warming center" means a facility established to mitigate the public health impacts of extreme cold.

(b) (1) Upon the next update of a city or county's emergency plan:

- (A) A county shall update its emergency plan to designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets.
- (B) A city that has previously adopted an emergency plan designating emergency shelters shall update its emergency plan to designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets.
- (C) Whenever a city or county designates any number of emergency shelters, it shall designate at least one emergency shelter that can accommodate persons with pets.
- (D) Whenever a city or county designates any number of emergency cooling centers, it shall, to the extent practicable, designate at least one cooling center that can accommodate persons with pets.
- (E) Whenever a city or county designates any number of emergency warming centers, it shall, to the extent practicable, designate at least one heating center that can accommodate persons with pets.

(2) An emergency shelter designated as able to accommodate persons with pets shall be in compliance with both of the following:

- (A) Safety procedures regarding the sheltering of pets referenced or established in the component of the state and local emergency plan.

(B) Applicable disaster assistance policies and procedures of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

(c) Whenever a city or county provides public information regarding the availability of a cooling center or warming center, that information shall include whether the cooling or warming center can accommodate pets.

(d) A city or county shall make available to the public by posting on its internet website information for pet emergency preparedness, including, but not limited to:

(1) Information for creating an evacuation plan and emergency checklist for pets consistent with recommendations publicly published by the Department of Food and Agriculture and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

(2) Local organizations that may provide emergency pet assistance.

(3) Local emergency shelters, cooling centers, or warming centers, when active, that can accommodate persons with pets.

SEC. 3. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.